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STATEMENT OF
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FOR CONSERVATION, RESEARCH, AND EDUCATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Before the Subcommittee on Environment, Soil Conservation, and Forestry, of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, United States Senate

On the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) Conducted by the Forest Service, USDA

FEBRUARY 6, 1979

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

I am pleased to be here this morning to review the relationship between the Department of Agriculture's RARE II recommendations and its Renewable Resource Program goals. Let me hasten to assure you that there is a positive relationship between the two.

RARE II was carried out to promptly allocate National Forest roadless areas either to wilderness or to other multiple uses. Delays in the adoption of land use plans, due in part to administrative appeals and litigation, have hindered effective management of this roadless area resource. The Department concluded early in 1977 that, if decisions were not made soon on the allocation of these roadless areas, some of the opportunities identified through the RPA process would be diminished or postponed indefinitely and that the sum of benefits and services to the American people from the National Forest System would be the less for it. Thus, RARE II paved the way for the accomplishment of RPA goals.

The RARE II Process

Filing of the RARE II final environmental statement on January 4 climaxed a year and a half of intensive work to assess the values and determine the most appropriate use of over 62 million acres of National Forest System land. To summarize this effort:

Following passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, which converted 9.1 million acres of Forest Service wilderness and wild areas to "statutory" wilderness, the Forest Service undertook the review of 5.4 million acres of primitive areas as mandated by the Act. In 1971, as the primitive area reviews and reports as to the suitability of these areas for wilderness status were nearing completion, the Forest Service initiated a roadless area review and evaluation (RARE) to determine which National Forest System areas--in addition to the Primitive Areas--also should be committed to wilderness study. These "de facto wilderness" areas were being proposed for statutory wilderness designation by citizen groups on a piecemeal basis, and the Agency saw the need for a comprehensive review in order to be able to respond to such citizen proposals and related congressional requests for recommendations. This original RARE effort focused on the western National Forests; it did not identify areas in the eastern National Forests or in the National Grasslands. RARE I resulted in the selection and temporary setting aside of 12.3 million acres in 274 different areas for wilderness study. Through land management planning, the Forest Service began to analyze in detail the potential of each of these areas for wilderness and other uses.

By the time I was confirmed as Assistant Secretary early in 19.7, it had become apparent to me and many others that this process wasn't entirely satisfactory--that this slow, piecemeal allocation of roadless areas probably wasn't the best way to determine their "best" use. So, at my direction, the Forest Service went back to the drawing board with a second, improved Roadless Area Review and Evaluation immediately dubbed RARE II, which was intended to be both more comprehensive and more decisive than its predecessor.

First step was to inventory all the roadless and undeveloped areas in the entire National Forest System. In the summer of 1977, Forest Service began compiling a list of the roadless and undeveloped areas it could readily identify in the National Forests and National Grasslands. More than 50,000 persons responded to the agency's request for suggested additions and deletions to the lists. Refined by this public comment, the inventory of roadless areas in the National Forest System was published in The Federal Register on November 18, 1977. The 2,686 areas were then evaluated and a draft environmental statement was released, on June 15, 1978, for further public review and comment. We received comments from 359,414 people who stated their preferences as to how specific areas should be allocated or suggested approaches and criteria we should use in arriving at our final decisions and recommendations. This public response was a key element in the process by which we reached agreement within the USDA on the proposed action contained in the final environmental statement.

Other important elements included the wilderness attributes of individual areas and the potential to achieve the 1975 RPA resource output goals. We sought to recognize the national interest, as well as local needs and possible effects on local economies and community stability.

The mineral resource ratings and development costs of individual roadless areas were used to identify potential resource trade-offs. A development opportunity rating system (DORS) was used to determine the relative cost effectiveness of nonwilderness management for each roadless area.

While areas with high wilderness attributes and low resource trade-offs were sought for wilderness, it was necessary to relate any wilderness allocations to an overall National Wilderness Prservation System and the

ultimate shape of that system. There was also a need to take a national look at the trade-offs involved in the allocation of these areas--the effects of any allocation on other resource values, and our ability to meet long-range resource goals.

We combined professional evaluation of the Area Evaluation Data and the advice and counsel of thousands of people inside and outside of the Department to come up with the Secretary's proposed action to allocate these 62 million acres of roadless areas, and the proposed action is this:

- o Fifteen million acres would be recommended to the 96th Congress for immediate designation as new units or additions to existing units of the National Wilderness Preservation System. In recommended areas, no activities which might alter wilderness qualities of the land will be allowed, unless permitted by law or prior rights. Entry for development purposes will be prohibited.

- o A little over 36 million acres would be managed for multiple uses other than wilderness, ranging from extensive uses with minimal impact--such as wildlife habitat improvements and range productivity enhancement to more intensive activities such as timber harvesting, motorized recreation opportunities, and water developments. These areas will become available for such activities on April 15, 1979. Entry for nonwilderness type activities and development will be described and controlled by existing or future land and resource management plans and in some instances special project plans. These plans may permit harvest and other management activities involving timber.

- o Allocation of some 10.8 million acres would be determined by further planning which will consider all appropriate uses including

wilderness. Land uses for most of these areas will be determined through National Forest land use plans which we expect to complete by 1985. These areas will remain essentially undeveloped until forest land and resource management plans, as prescribed by Section 6 of the National Forest Management Act, or other specific project plans meeting National Environmental Policy Act requirements are completed.

Exploration and leasing for oil and gas will be permitted under rigid stipulations as described in the final environmental impact statement. No harvesting of timber will be allowed in these areas other than for emergency reasons, but standing timber on commercial forest land in the areas will be used to determine potential yield.

Secretary Bob Bergland has asked governors and members of Congress for their reactions to the Department's proposal. Concurrently, our recommendations are being reviewed by other Federal agencies. We have asked for their comments by February 28. They will be used as the basis of a "fine-tuning" of our current recommendations prior to final inter-agency review and the development of a consensus among the several interested departments and agency representatives and White House staff on a proposal to send to the President for his approval and transmission to the Congress with a recommendation for action.

Relationship to the RPA

RARE II complements both the RPA process and the land management planning process and, as such, is consistent with the 1974 Renewable Resources Planning Act and the 1976 National Forest Management Act. The

1975 RPA recommended Program targets can be compared with the results of RARE II. These targets, however, are likely to differ in the 1980 RPA Recommended Program now in the initial development stages.

The 1975 RPA program established "target outputs" from the total National Forest System for wilderness, timber sale offerings, developed recreation use, dispersed recreation use, and grazing. The portion of each target output that should be attributed to RARE II inventoried roadless areas has been identified based upon regional determinations. When we compare 1975 RPA program targets and potential outputs with our RARE II recommendations, we find that all program targets can be met or exceeded, with the exception of sawtimber sale offerings, which fall slightly short of the 1985 mid-level target.

Forest Service timber sale offerings have averaged 11.5 billion board feet over the past three years. Within the next three to five years the effect on this timber sale program of designating the wilderness proposed by RARE II and holding some areas for further planning would be to reduce the annual sale by only some 150 million board feet of sawtimber and 25 million board feet of other products--less than a 2 percent reduction.

The timber sale program level for FY 1980 probably will not be affected at all by RARE II proposed action. Preliminary analysis indicates that implementation of the RARE II proposed action would cause only minor reductions, if any, in the FY 1981 sales program. This is being verified by our field people as they prepare their five-year programs.

This estimate of RARE II's impact on timber sales is based on the assumption that the roadless areas recommended for uses other than wilderness will be available after April 15. Should areas not be available at that time, some further reductions in the sales program would occur.

The size of that reduction depends on the number of areas affected and when they become available for uses other than wilderness.

In summary, the effect of all proposed roadless area allocations on our ability to meet the 1985 mid-level RPA sawtimber sale target of 13.9 billion board feet is reduced by 400 million board feet; the proposal permits achievement of over 97 percent of the RPA goal for timber. Actual sale levels will be dependent on economic considerations and other factors. Our RARE II "Development Opportunity Cost" analyses indicate that intensive forestry would not be cost effective in much of the 26 million acres recommended by RARE II for wilderness or further planning.

By way of explanation, the 1975 RPA Program assumes that the annual potential yield of the National Forest System is roughly 15.5 billion board feet. This is the annual timber yield that, it is estimated, could be obtained in 1985 on a multiple use, sustained yield basis utilizing intensive forest management practices. Approximately 12 billion board feet is cost effective. If the Wilderness System additions proposed in RARE II final environmental statement are made, there would be a reduction of about 1.2 billion board feet in this long-term potential yield. If all further planning areas were allocated to wilderness, there would be an additional .6 billion reduction in potential yield.

Impact on Inflation

On April 11, 1978, the President asked the Secretaries of Agriculture, and the Interior, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Council on Wage and Price Stability, the Council of Economic Advisors, and the Office of Management and Budget for an evaluation of the best way to sustain expanded timber harvests from Federal, State and private land and other

means of increasing timber yield in ways that would be environmentally acceptable. There are no easy, quick solutions to meeting current and and future timber demands which are expected to remain high throughout the 1980s. We are continuing to analyze these issues.

Analysis by the Forest Service indicates that the proposed RARE II action, while changing the timber supply slightly, will not have a significant effect on inflation. Even if all "further planning" areas were to be allocated to non-wilderness use, the wholesale price index for lumber and wood products in 1985 would be less than one percent lower and if all "further planning" areas were designated as wilderness, the index would increase about one percent. These changes translate into very minor changes in the cost and availability of single family dwellings.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear here this morning, Mr. Chairman. I believe implementation of the actions proposed in the final environmental statement on RARE II will allow for both a steady flow of goods and services from Natonal Forest System lands and for the strengthening of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

This concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to respond to your questions.

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